

THE LIMITATIONS OF DEMOCRACY¹

OF all the moon-madness that from time to time engages the consciousness of man, none is more lunatic than his delusion of grandeur. I do not mean by this the sense of exaltation that possesses him when he contemplates some great and lofty manifestation of human potential as it shows itself in the character or the achievements of notable individuals; in the splendor of great personalities, their heroism, their human kindness, their mental and spiritual refulgence as it reveals itself in philosophy, in mystical or practical religion, in creative statesmanship, scientific achievement, in letters and in the arts. History records unnumbered revelations of Divinity, their works are exalting and immortal, and by them history is made. I mean rather that tendency to attribute to man as a class, a genus, those qualities that are only of the few in proportion to the all, so exalting to supremacy what is really inferior and has, in effect, little part in that glory which is so jealously guarded and is granted to a time only under narrow limitations, varying as between one epoch and another, but never to such a degree that it becomes a preponderance, or even a dominant minority.

Taking man by and large, as history reveals him during the past six thousand years, and in no unduly flattering light: even from the first, from almost that mysterious moment

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some four thousand years B.C. when he appears at last as a human entity—man as we have known him since and as we know him today—from the days of Akhnaton to this year of grace, there has been no lack of men “of light and leading” but like the stars in the firmament their brightness is but as pinpoints in the abyss of the heavens. They are the “saving remnant” and they save indeed. But there is less credit to be attributed to the great mass from which they rise from darkness and into light. Between them and this same mass there is a great gulf fixed. Of course, it would be neither fair nor true to say that this vast majority must lie in the same condemnation. The cruelty and the meanness and the lust, the dullness of mind, the petty greed, the gross selfishness, that are characteristic of man at his lowest, are marks of only one end of the human sequence, giving place at the other end to a type of childishness of very limited mental capacity, and to a tragic subservience to “mob psychology” that pathetically limit the very real desire for beauty and righteousness, fighting ever against the grace of God that is always working patiently to overcome these limitations. The *will* to good is, we may assume, very general; the *power* to good is exceedingly limited in its potency.

Science does not reveal man in a very encouraging light. Biologically he is the most helpless of animals, the least well adapted to his environment and the least adequately equipped to contend with that nature of which he is a part. His instincts are atrophied, his intelligence slow of development, and except in the minority of cases incapable of progress beyond a certain and not very advanced point. The spark of immortal soul implanted in him strives against adversity and hard limitations, and in the majority of cases life is a tragedy of non-fulfillment. Compare him in his nakedness and his helplessness with many another of the

animal kingdom, with the lion or the deer, the swift and beautiful birds, and butterflies of the air. Their adaptation to environment is perfect, they achieve the limits of their capacity, they play to perfection the parts for which they were created, but man, equipped with his potential mind and soul is in life-long conflict with all about him, with his own fellows, with his very self. It is a one-sided battle against great odds, but when victory is won the glory is greater than happens elsewhere in creation. For this bitter warfare all honor is his even when, as so frequently happens, it has issue in generally partial, frequently total defeat. The fact remains, however, that this defeat is general and therefore, apart from the credit of the effort, there is little of actual accomplishment that may serve as excuse for this same "delusion of grandeur" that, as I say, has beset man from time to time and never more vigorously than during the past hundred years.

History is no more favorable than biology. There is no epoch that has not recorded greatness, however limited, or the will to good amongst a struggling people. On the other hand those things that stand out in the annals of life are the opposed characteristics of savagery. Selfishness, covetousness and pride amongst the leaders and the blindness and incapacity of the mass of men either under this leadership or driven by the mob-insanity that is worse than the frenzied panic of a herd of wild beasts. War and massacre and murder make up the bulk of history and there is hardly the space of a generation in the last six thousand years that is not red with the records of savage slaughter. Since the dawn of the Christian Era every empire has been repeatedly devastated by fire and sword until at last it perished in blood—Carthage, Athens, Rome, Byzantium, the Mohammedan Caliphates, the republics and principalities and kingdoms of all Western

Europe. True, we may attribute the initiative and much of the execution to the ambition and brutality and selfishness of individual leaders, whether sovereigns or soldiers or politicians, but it was the people who did the fighting and who were guilty of the sequent rape and robbery and massacre. Worse even as evidence of what man will do of his own initiative is the mob-action that puts even war to shame. We have seen the worst in our own time in Russia where a people, though only a minority it is true, has risen in inconceivable savagery to write the bloodiest page in all history, matching Genghis Khan in beastliness. And back of this lies the mob-action of the French Revolution, and that of the epoch of the Protestant revolution, with dim red memories of the Spanish Inquisition and the expulsion of the Moors and the Fourth Crusade in Constantinople and servile revolts in Rome. And mingled with these greater infamies are all the smaller madnesses of witchcraft manias, Jewish pogroms, Spanish slaughterings in the Americas, the Cromwellian massacres in Ireland, the ruthless cruelty of the beginnings of industrialism in England, the extermination of the Indian tribes in America, the record of the Congo and of the islands of the West Indies. And what would one say of the World War, its origins and its methods? No, history bears no convincing testimony to the nobility and the pre-eminence of man in the sphere of earthly life if he is regarded in the mass and not in the shape of selected individuals.

All the more are we bound to recognize and to abase ourselves before these same sporadic evidences of the grace of God and the potential that is implicit in man. The Kalendar of Saints is a glorious galaxy and to this must be added those many great secular characters and bright geniuses in every field of human activity. How should we ex-

The Limitations of Democracy 179

pect these stars to shine so brightly in the darkness of their firmament? Nor is it these alone who give us such courage and so far restore a shaken confidence in humanity. In the unrecorded multitude of lives, and the more perhaps as we go lower in the social scale, are the mute millions in whom we recognize with joy the same faith and patience, the kindness and courage, the simple virtue and the high-hearted striving for good that mark the saint and the righteous man. They go far towards restoring the balance imperilled by the childishness and folly and actual criminality of the other category of humankind, and its inescapable subservience to that mob spirit which is the very negation of reason and of righteousness. Even so, and counting all things that are favorable, one cannot escape the conviction that the theological doctrine that man is a fallen creature, redeemable only by the grace of God, is biologically as well as dogmatically true.

I am not aware that any religion, whether ethnic or revealed, gives good ground for this delusion of grandeur, this spiritual pride, that occasionally enslaves the imagination. Always it is presupposed that man is not only fallible but in himself incapable of righteousness without divine assistance. Neither the religions of Asia nor those of paganism, neither Catholicism nor Protestantism, nor even the pessimistic philosophies of Germany give any encouragement to such fancies. It is only during the last hundred years of the new orientation born of the Renaissance, the Protestant revolution, the democratic dogmatism of the eighteenth century and the scientific aggrandizement of the nineteenth century and what has passed of the twentieth, that the old "conviction of sin" has passed away and a mad megalomania has taken its place. Not, I must admit, without excuse. So altogether amazing, so wholly without

precedent, has been the scientific and technological development of the last hundred years, it is hardly to be wondered at that man has gone mad in his own conceit and now proclaims himself, as a race, a physiological and intellectual phenomenon, higher than the high gods (if there are any gods) worthy of any responsibility, unlimited in his potentialities and capable, if this were possible, of rising to even higher ranges of achievement.

The physicists of the nineteenth century, from Darwin onward, were largely responsible for this, and the harm they did was less through positing an untenable theory of human evolution than through their assumption of Man's present eminence and his ultimate perfectibility. Rousseau and the "egalitarians" were of the same ilk, with Karl Marx as the *reductio ad absurdum* of their moon-struck theories. To the effect of their teaching has been added the psychological influence of the astonishing scientific and industrial achievements of man during the last one hundred and twenty-five years, and the natural result has been the present "delusion of grandeur" that makes the genus Man a self-sufficient entity, equal as between all its individuals, capable of wise judgment in his deliberations as a whole, and the only arbiter, through universal suffrage and by majority rule, of all matters affecting the public and the private life of the community and its component parts.

I am convinced that the reverse is the case and that man, as a whole, taken *en masse*, and independent of his environment (an important proviso I admit) is no more capable now of dealing with the problems of society than he was when his ancestors hid in the caves of Iberia from the ice and the wild beasts of the last glacial epoch.

If this is so then it would appear that the current type of democracy, social, political, intellectual, is an error. This

The Limitations of Democracy 181

I believe to be the case. It is the evidence, not of a new and creative movement in society, but of its decadence and of the ultimate failure and disappearance of that epoch in which it has become a controlling force. It would appear that the method of life is something like this. Out of the great fluid, formless mass of humanity rise at certain intervals brilliant demonstrations of character or genius. These are the prophets, leaders, teachers, and between them and the dumb mass from which they sprung, there is no greater kinship than between Neolithic man and the free citizens of Athens or the mediaeval guildsmen of Europe. They are not what man *is*, they are, perhaps, what he might be. Through the power of these human phenomena new aspects of truth are revealed, new forms of organized life are made possible, new vistas of religion are laid open, new methods of living, new aspects of art and literature and science. The very essence of man is desire for leadership, therefore, these day-stars, these vessels of divine grace are either martyred or exalted to preëminence, depending on the temper of the time, i. e., whether they have come at the crucial moment or too early for recognition and acceptance. If society is ready for them, then they have their day, the people accept their leading. By their directed labor a new life is built up and one of the recurrent periods of culture comes into being. One if not two such epochs occurred in the Minoan Kingdoms, three at least in Egypt, two in Greece, two in the Rome of the West, two in the Rome of the East. In recent times we have the Moorish Caliphates and the Christian Renaissance in Spain, the Middle Ages in all Western Europe, the Italian Renaissance, the Elizabethan age in England, the Colonial period in the United States, and finally the technological civilization of the nineteenth century. These of course are only some of the major epochs, there

are many more of lesser note and more local affiliations. In every case the inception came from a few great leaders and each era gathered to itself regenerated elements from the great earth-bound fund of undeveloped human potential.

And then the nemesis of progress showed itself. As more and more the submerged element was released from the bondage of its own incapacity, as the environment became more ample and stimulating, and as opportunity knocked more often and insistently at long-barred doors, the gravitational pull of inertia began to exert itself. The dullness that could not comprehend found itself in places of influence, gross personalities leaped into power, wealth fell into the hands of the crafty and covetous, opportunity was lavished on incapacity, high ideals were coarsened, degraded and made the means to material ends, until finally the quantitative took the place of the qualitative and the majority became dominant over the minority, after which nothing was possible except the end of an era and the beginning of the slow process of building another, men watching always for the coming of the new leaders who should guarantee the desired future.

Note, please, that in this process there was actually little of condemnation for those who, emergent from the lower mass, brought ruin in the end. That was not their intent nor was their motive evil. It was simply that opportunity, power and privilege had fallen into, sometimes been forced upon, hands that could not use what had been given them. Men who would have made good peasants, loyal followers of fine mastership, were strained beyond their power by tests they could not meet. There is nothing more tragic than an honest and well-meaning, but only crudely developed man, forced into a place he ought not to occupy and burdened by opportunities and obligations that are beyond his powers

The Limitations of Democracy 183

and that he ought not to be forced to assume. The able but unscrupulous man with all power in his hands is dangerous enough, but far more a menace to society is the scrupulous man of limited intelligence and capacity pitchforked into place and power and given command over what he cannot control.

In the past, delusion of grandeur has most frequently been the attribute of individuals who, obsessed by their own superiority to the mass of men about them, have claimed essential divinity and have often achieved divine homage during their lifetime, followed by posthumous apotheosis. Today it is man as a whole, at least, it is the masses of humanity that form the so-called civilized states, that are deeply persuaded of their own supremacy, not only over all other forms of creation, but over all peoples of the past. It is easy to see why this is so. Protestant and democratic philosophy, working in perfect unity of purpose and method, have broken down all the barriers between degrees of character and capacity, have destroyed the sense of varied values and have established the régime of quantitative in place of qualitative standards. Feudalism, kingship and aristocracy—three sequent systems that have each in turn worked for the preservation of these fundamental and wholesome ideals—have all dissolved and disappeared, giving place to a new organism where all men from the venal racketeer and the venal politician to the artist, the philosopher, and the prophet are assumed to be not only free but equal; equal in ability, in intelligence and in character. Privilege is no longer extended to proven capacity but to craftiness, and to this go the rewards in the terms of money and power. The results are what now give us pause. One of these is the reaction towards an autocracy of manual laborers with the disfranchisement of intellect and high character and

their reduction to serfdom, the other is the reaction towards absolutism, where the will of one man is supreme, as in the last days of the old monarchy just before the democratic tempest broke.

Where these reactions have not become operative and the old democratic system still prevails, it is the great mass of undeveloped humanity, Neolithic man still persisting, that exercises the power either directly and by weight of his preponderant numbers, or indirectly through his subservience to those who have made themselves his masters through their comprehension of his nature and their facile method of bringing their ideas and their actions into conformity with his own very limited capacity, and the power of this mass-man is almost unlimited. Released from bondage by political and social revolution, he found himself almost at once the possessor of all the new engines of wealth and advancement brought into being by the great industrial revolution and the fabulous achievements of science. Both were excellently calculated to work his rise to power for they offered themselves unreservedly to just those personal qualities that were native to him, and had been intensified by the serfdom that had been his lot since the breakdown and disappearance of the old mediaeval system with its large measure of freedom and its secular and ecclesiastical institutions that had fostered his self-respect, developed his character and given its rewards to real social and personal values, as had not been before in any comparable degree. For three centuries, except for the Colonial period in America and that of the Early Republic, every influence had been towards oppression and the curbing of any efforts towards advancement, while the first fifty years of the new industrialism in England had debased him still further. When at last the crust of tyranny and enslave-

The Limitations of Democracy 185

ment, fabricated by political absolutism, the vested interests of landed wealth, and the gross selfishness and brutality of the manufacturer, was broken and the great mass of the proletariat burst through like a volcanic eruption, it was the qualities of craftiness and cupidity, welded into the basic factors native to his inherent quality, that seized upon the new powers ready to his hand and received the rewards of successful handling. There are of course many exceptions; if this were not so then civilization would have broken up long ago, but it is true to say that the development of democratic government and industrial civilization has been very largely at the hands, not of those who were fortified by tradition and inherited culture and a high sense of real values, but of those who by character and capacity and vision were least fitted to use the incredibly vast new potentialities to their best ends and their greatest advantage.

Democratic government is breaking down in every country in Europe where it is in operation and already recourse is had to a revived absolutism as an escape from the venality and futility of the parliamentary system or the ultimate nemesis of a "dictatorship of the proletariat." It requires courage, perhaps foolhardiness to say it, but industrialism, technological civilization, is in the same case, and even now, at the very summit of its triumphant progress, it is almost at the breaking point and it cannot be long before it reveals its weakness even as has happened in the case of its twin brother, political and social democracy. Let me try to justify this statement.

There is to me something fantastic in the orgy of optimism, publicly displayed (whether it is privately held or not is another matter) over the manifest destiny of industrialism to recover from its occasional reverses, and especially the one in process today, and to go on, along the same

road, to even higher achievement. Everywhere we confront the alarming menace of unemployment, some fifteen or twenty million of men out of work in Europe and America. What is the significance of this? That it is a temporary post-war condition; that it is an accident of a passing condition that is bound to right itself? This seems to me an explanation so far from the facts that it takes on an aspect almost of criminality. Is not the reality this: that applied science through labor-saving machinery has not only actually reduced the amount of man-power necessary to produce a thousand times the amount of manufactured products that could have been wrought out by hand a century ago, but has also resulted in enormous overproduction, in a mass of objects and produce of all sorts greater than the normal market demands. Faced by this vast surplus the producer, unwilling to cut profits or curtail his output, throws himself into an orgy of scientific and psychological advertising in order to stimulate a diffident demand that already shows signs of having reached the saturation point. For a long time the hands thrown out of work by machines found employment through the new activities directly or indirectly created by this same mechanical development, but now these new opportunities are not offering themselves in proportion to the progressive elimination of man-power as Mr. Ford's system of mechanization goes into effect more and more widely. To these two causes we owe, I believe, the present unemployment which is so at odds with our claim to a condition of unexampled prosperity.

Nor is there any sign of change for the better. As I say, the advertising campaign, pushed to the most inordinate lengths, has about reached the limit of stimulation. In every country of Europe taxation has sharply curtailed purchasing power, yet over-production continues along many

The Limitations of Democracy 187

lines though in some cases it is perforce being reduced, with still further accessions to the army of the unemployed. Moreover, apparently no account is being taken of what is being done by Soviet Russia. If the nemesis of the red criminality of Bolshevism holds off until, and if, the present plans for an intensive industrialization of the U. S. S. R. is accomplished, then the world will be flooded by products created under compulsion and through low wages fixed by law, that can be marketed at half the price that would show a profit elsewhere. This is not an alarmist theory. Already it has actually happened in several lines of industry, including matches, and very shortly the same process may be repeated along other lines. What we confront is not a temporary mal-adjustment in the industrial and agricultural field, but, as I say, the beginnings of a breakdown similar to that which has happened in the case of democratic government.

What does this all mean? Simply that the type of man that has preponderantly determined the course that has been followed in the working out in practical form of the democratic idea and the development of potential in the scientific and mechanical discoveries of the last hundred years, has been inadequate to the task. It had neither vision, the character nor the ability to control these vast powers, curbing them against excess, safeguarding them against gross, selfish exploitation, and directing them along sane, wholesome and constructive lines.

I repeat what I have said before: the great mass of men is and always has been of the Neolithic type, but where the men of the Stone Age had nothing but fire to cook with and a technical ability to chip flints into arrow and spear heads, and therefore could not go very far wrong in spite of their sharply limited intelligence, their intellectual and character

kin-folk of recent times have ready to their hand the ten thousand new powers, with their infinite and amoral potential that are also at the disposal of the men of light and leading. They are undisciplined children possessed of a vast number of mechanical toys. They do not break them in sheer wantonness, to be sure, but they use them recklessly and without discretion for their own selfish purposes and with no more sense of social values and social ends than the Bandar-log of Kipling's tales. There was, and is, great value and promise in the democratic ideal; there were, and are, infinite possibilities in thermodynamics, coal, iron, steam, machinery, electricity. How have these powers been wasted or misapplied; how tragical the immediate result; how ominous the portents of the future!

The conclusion is no longer escapable that the current idea and practice of democracy, whether in politics, industry or society, are a wrong interpretation by men of deficient capacity, of realities, in themselves great and full of even greater possibilities. For the time being they have been given a wrong direction and their promise has not been fulfilled. If the democratic theory could have been developed without the simultaneous expansion of the natural possibilities inherent in the enormous phenomena of scientific, mechanical and industrial revelation; if these could have been put in process and carried to their final issue at other hands than those that actually took over the control, then we might not today be confronting the problem of how to regain the road that leads to high culture and a continuing society. It was the combination of these two new energies that, acting together, has made each of little avail so far as permanent values are concerned. The same thing happened at the beginning of the sixteenth century, that is, the interaction of two forces, each possessed of strong

elements of value—the Renaissance and the Reformation—that in the end cancelled out, leaving the eighteenth century in far worse case than had neither of these phenomena occurred. The world did not learn the lesson, however—it never does learn from experience—so we in our day continue our vain repetition of history.

But must we continue it; is it our destiny to work out the ending of an era that began with the high promise of Renaissance and Reformation and received its following and tremendously potent cumulative incentives of Revolution and scientific revelation, in that failure that for six thousand years has overtaken every other culture that man has brought into being? It would seem to be true that by some mysterious law civilization divides itself into cycles of five centuries, each with its swift rise, its high culmination, its dying fall, when all is to do over again. Our own five-hundred-year period has but a scant seventy years to run, and in spite of the delusive glamor of supreme scientific discovery, inventive achievement and industrial supremacy, the signs of the declining curve of *essential* power are not far to seek. Yet, as I have said, not all nations or peoples have registered their greatness in a single cycle and I am bold to believe that in America also, though her present democratic, technological civilization may and must decline as the century nears its end, we can if we will, avert a premature oblivion and by taking thought build now the foundations for a second epoch that shall establish its nature and its mastership by the turn of the century and guarantee a greatness such as thus far we have not known.

And there are two reasons for this. In the first place we have not yet had our full span of five hundred years in which to show what we could do. A century and more had passed of this same era before our ancestors set foot on

these shores. True, we inherited some portion of the Renaissance, though hardly more than its dregs, while we certainly *did* inherit all of the Reformation, and we certainly also participated in the Revolution. Nevertheless, we began under a handicap and it would be only fair that we should have another chance. In the second place, the potential that is available now through the scientific and material and technological achievements of the last hundred and fifty years is fabulously greater than that ever accorded before to any generation of men. The question simply is: how do we propose to utilize this potential? If we go on as we have done during the same period, leaving the development of democratic government, of industrialism and trade, of religion and ethics and social life in the same hands that predominantly have had control for the last seventy-five years, in a word, if the power rests in the hands of the Neolithic majority, then our chance is gone and for us there is no future other than that history records of Cnossus, Babylon, Thebes and Carthage, Athens, Rome, Byzantium, Venice and Moscow.

And again I must insist on the one point on which my whole argument is based, viz: that man *in the mass* does not change and has not changed or perceptibly advanced during the historic period of six thousand years. It is quite possible that I am wrong, that my point has no validity, and if so, my interpretation of history is erroneous, my conclusions unjustifiable. If so, history is a most misleading guide, for, viewed without prejudice and with no preconceived theories to sustain, such is its unmistakable teaching. Between the passing of the Magdalenian race and the Neolithic Age no creature existed on earth, so far as the records show, that we have any right to call man. There were low-grade animals walking more or less erect and with some

The Limitations of Democracy 191

superficial resemblance to man, existing among many other animals, many of them of much higher grade. In the Neolithic period humanism appeared, rather suddenly; a dead level of capacity marked chiefly by an increased power of memory and a rudimentary capacity for organized thought. Of individual or racial *character* we can deduce nothing from the artifacts that remain, but it is abundantly evident that in Neolithic man there was no effective differentiation. It was a society, if we may call it such, which had all the ear-marks of that Marxian communism which would seem to be the ideal of the present masters of what once was Russia, the veritable "Golden Age" to which, though he did not know it, Rousseau was harking back.

I emphasize this quality of level uniformity and sharply restricted potential, because it is not only the controlling factor in Neolithic society but also because it sets it off so distinctly from what was to follow after 4000 B.C. while it also characterizes very clearly the changeless flow and continuity of the great body of humanity that has followed on even until now.

What was that quality that suddenly showed itself about 4000 B.C. when, out of a social darkness, without form and void, suddenly sprung those vivid, complete and almost synchronous civilizations of Crete and Egypt and the valleys of the Tigris and Euphrates? It was the flashing advent of pattern men, geniuses, seers, creators, leaders. Men in their physical aspect, intelligence, character rose leagues in their stature above their fellows and equalled, even perhaps bettered, anything the human type has since produced. Considering that these men of Cnossus and Thebes and Ur of the Chaldees had behind them but a few centuries at most of a culture and a tradition struggling to evolve from nothingness, while we of the last two centuries are the heirs

of six thousand years of varied and cumulative achievement, we must give to these men of the Bronze Age and the sequent millennium credit for a brain power and a spiritual apprehension and a skill of hand far greater than what we ourselves can boast. It is almost as though the old theological legend were true and that "out of the dust of the earth" God created man in His own image on the 18th day of October, at four o'clock in the afternoon, and in the year 4004 B.C.

Here then is the whole point. It was the portentous advent of the—shall we say—superman—that suddenly transformed the society of Neolithic man and brought into being, almost by a cataclysmic process, that great culture which, in all its vicissitudes, in its advances and its retrogressions, has made up the chronicle of world-history so far as this pertains to man. It was no process of slow, mass-evolution; the mass remained static. It was the meteoric advent of great men, for the first time appearing in history, who inspired the first glory of the Bronze and Homeric epochs and so made inevitable the sequent glories of Egypt, Babylonia, Athens, Rome, Byzantium, the Middle Ages, the Renaissance and the present Modernism.

Yes, but where did they come from, these revealers and creators? Of course, from the undifferentiated Neolithic mass; there could be no other source. In a sense then, it is this same great underlying mass of humanity that is the most potent and precious thing in creation. By some process, unconscious, but inevitable, it casts up from time to time unique personalities that, like Prometheus, bring down the fire from heaven—and give it to their fellows. Amazing how every one of the Hellenic myths—and Egyptian and Semitic as well—has in it the flame of eternal truth, the brightness of revelation! So the fire is won by the chosen

The Limitations of Democracy 193

man—*but*, it is won not for himself, but for those of his kind who could not scale the walls of Olympus or plunge scatheless into the depths of Hades. Blindly, passionately, unconsciously, the Neolithic mass engenders its leaders and its saviors who, so begotten and rising into the light out of darkness, reveal, lead and in all society rightly organized and administered, direct and control that society and create a vital and wholesome and historic culture.

Man in the mass is then the prolific matrix out of which spring those men who by their character and attainments, attributed not to themselves, but to the race, give us our delusion of grandeur and so mislead us into the devious ways of social, political and economic democracy. By rights, and for our own best interests, power and direction and leadership should rest with those who have risen above their Neolithic environment, and conversely, there is no greater mistake that can be made and no greater disservice rendered to themselves, than to place in the hands of the incompetent, powers and privileges they cannot adequately administer. The mark of the modern age is less its triumph in science and mechanics and industry, supreme as this is, than it is in the wild and willful way in which it has handicapped the average man and negatived his native potentiality by forcing him to a position where he is called upon to act beyond his inborn ability. For a century and a half what I must call the mass-man has shown himself increasingly incompetent as his responsibilities have correspondingly grown, until today, at the very crest of our technological civilization, we confront a situation where inefficiency and ineptitude characterize the administration of public affairs, while the mentality of under-developed children determines the intellectual and ethical standards that are established in society, and imposed on those of

higher character and attainments by the sheer force and weight of the majority will.

If you are prompted to deny this, to charge me with black pessimism, to call me a calamity howler, I ask you first to look around with open eyes and unprejudiced mind. Here are names only, words to denote conditions. I assemble them without comment for you may draw your own conclusions.

The K. K. K., fundamentalism and the Scopes trial; the Methodist board of temperance, prohibition and public morals; Boston censorship; the Eighteenth Amendment; the general run of municipal and state governments with the laws they pass; the Senate of the United States; Herin and Sherman and Chicago; modernist art; the carnival of advertising; the October orgies of the New York stock exchange; the evidence offered by the content and make-up of newspapers to the intellectual and moral standards of their readers; the same in the case of the popular magazines; the medical fakes and psychological superstitions that flourish on popular support; the kind of religion and the sanctified monkey-shines that are put forward, unrebuked, by many of the evangelical denominations and are shamelessly recorded to the dumbfounding of later historians, in the "Americana" of the *American Mercury*. I could go on indefinitely, literally *ad nauseam*, for life today is shot through and through with qualities that indicate one thing, and that the dominance of a low-grade mentality that demonstrates the existence in society today of a working majority that at best may be termed Neolithic.

Do not misunderstand me: the majority is always more or less of this nature; the point is, however, that it was not often in the past that it has been in supreme control, or at most only for brief periods at the very end of an era. There is always, there is today, a minority that has character,

The Limitations of Democracy 195

creative intelligence, a sense of comparative values, the vision of abiding realities. Probably the sum of this excelling quality is as great today as ever it was, even though for the moment there are fewer of the supreme rank—the geniuses, the super-men, such for example as marked the fifth century B.C., the first half of the thirteenth, the first quarter of the fifteenth and the last half of the nineteenth century—than could be found at similar crises, turning points of history, in the past. The whole question is, which moiety is in control, which establishes the standards, makes the laws, directs the outer lives of mankind as a whole? If it is the minority then culture develops and society continues; if it is the majority, civilization may progress for a time, but culture declines and in the end there is the débâcle that presages a fallow period and then the arduous building up of a new era on the wide ruin the old has wrought.

I end here my Jeremiad. What is its application; what has it to say to you who patiently, though with tolerant smiles or resentful frowns dissent from what I feel bound to say? Just this: there is no Calvinistic foreordination that predestines one man to ascent and ten thousand to a static and irredeemable mediocrity. Sovereign over destiny is *Will* and the will to achieve is the one natural right of man. Equality of opportunity is the essence and the justification of democratic theory and this we have today, this you have today in very unusual degree. In the past there have been from time to time active factors in society that have not only stimulated this Will, but have offered the opportunity for its exercise. Varied in their nature each has played its part well, as is evidenced by the roll of honor of great personalities and high cultures throughout history. The enlightened monarchies of Egypt, the intellectual and artistic aristocracy of Greece, the grasping and expanding imperial-

ism of Rome, the Catholic Church and particularly its stimulating monastic system, the feudal order of the early Middle Ages, the trade and craft guilds of the later Middle Ages, the far-flung adventure of the Renaissance era, the landed aristocracy of the eighteenth century, each did its work of stimulation, gave its rewards, recorded its triumphs and passed into history. None of these is operative today but in its turn comes the new agency for similar stimulus, reward and chronicling, and that is the agency of higher learning: the college and the university. Here, if anywhere, is to be found equality of opportunity and if here we cannot count on the stimulus toward that ascent out of the average to high excelling that is the guaranty of ascending culture, I do not know where we are to find it. This, indeed, is the high prerogative of the college. Not the furnishing of the student with the means of making a living, or even of ultimate preëminence in some field of engineering or other form of applied science, but the revealing of the student *to himself*, and the developing to the best advantage of the potential that is in him. The college is not for all, indeed, it is for comparatively few. It cannot create what is not latent in the student and it is no shame if after trial a boy finds that his vocation is not here. What it can do is to make available to the receptive mind the cumulative and digested wisdom of six thousand years, at the same time training and guiding and stimulating both mind and character to the end that those possessed of inherent power to rise above the normal level may accomplish the destined ascent. There is a place for the trade school and the technical school; they both have their real value, but the function of the college and the university is selection and expansion; the discovery, the development and the utilization of leaders of men.

The Limitations of Democracy 197

For this is the need, the insistent, indeed the vital need of the present day. The new and inordinate stimuli of mechanical revelation have raised up out of the lower average the present leaders of men and the controllers of physical forces within the field of technological civilization and all that this implies. They have not equally, or in any measurable degree, brought into existence the leaders in religion, philosophy, statesmanship and all the other categories of spiritual, intellectual and ethical human life without whom the unstable equilibrium of society is destroyed, with that calamity following on that already has been recorded with monotonous and periodical regularity through the whole period of history. Unless this want is supplied, unless we have once more that dominating leadership that builds fundamental and lasting values, then each added acquisition along mechanical lines weakens the social structure while it deprives mass-man of more and more of that heritage that should be his. We are possessed of a wealth of powers such as no race, no time, has ever had before, but to these we have become bond-slaves where of just right we should be both the lords and the beneficiaries.

Every college and every university has within its student body those personalities, those characters that are capable of this development, and of this leadership. In them lies the future of our nation and our era. The sheer dynamic of a superficially triumphant materialism is enough to blight this potential and turn the possible leaders of men and saviors of society into just another class of recruits for its own plausible but delusive scheme of life. The temptation to this recreancy may be resisted and must be resisted, for out of the schools alone, it would now appear, must come those who, before it is too late, may restore the balance of forces, so assuring for the immediate future, not an ending

in failure, but a regeneration through the revelation of right direction, that will be the fulfillment of those illimitable possibilities now resting in our hands.

I have perhaps drawn a gloomy picture of contemporary society as it has developed under incompetent guidance, of that Neolithic sort of man that seems to be the continuing type of humanity in the mass. To achieve a just balance I should with equal insistence draw that contrasting portrait of the high achievements of the human race, of the seers and prophets, the saints and heroes, the inspirers and revealers that throughout history have shone like bright stars, making and marking successive periods of culture and by their glory giving a show of plausibility to man's delusion of grandeur. To do this would be wholly unnecessary. You know them as well as I; the figures of greatness and nobility and power and high character that mark every category of human life in almost every era of history. Choose them for yourselves and from any field where your interest lies. You cannot list too many, nor can you estimate them beyond their deserts, nor exalt them to too great honor. Isolated from their environment of mediocrity and used as a measure of man, they justify the saying that God created man a little lower than the angels—if even that. They are the evidence of what man has been, the pattern of what he may be. The generation now declining to its end has set its aim too low, merging its aspirations in those of the lower average of humanity. Already the new generation—yours in place of mine—has given evidences of revolt, of formulating and striving for something more exalted than that which sufficed for their fathers. Here lies the hope, indeed the assurance of regeneration, of a new cultural epoch. It is in the confidence of its attainment that the passing generation takes heart of hope and cries to you "God speed."

The Limitations of Democracy 199

I said in the beginning that there was no justification for man's delusion of grandeur. This is true if you regard the race as a whole, but it is untrue if your eyes are fixed on those innumerable manifestations through great personalities of what the individual man may be and what he may accomplish for his fellows. History is simply a record of these achievements. The time has now come for another dispensation of leaders of men. It is to this end that this college and its fellows are established, not, I repeat, for the development of more captains of industry and merchant princes, not even for erudite scholars and ingenious scientists, but for the lifting of men out of the mass of man, that they may know themselves, discover the ratio of true values, assume their rightful position of leadership, and so once more emulate Prometheus and win the true fire of wisdom and enlightenment and righteousness from the jealous gods that they may give it to their fellow men.

RALPH ADAMS CRAM.

